



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release JULY 1, 1958

#### SEATON ASKS FOR PROTECTION OF THE POLAR BEAR AND WALRUS ON HIGH SEAS

The polar bear and the walrus, which until recently have been living in comparative safety on the edges of the Arctic ice pack, will have protection on the high seas should the Congress accept the revisions of the Alaska Game Law recommended by Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton. The Department, through authority already granted by the Congress, can control the taking of these animals in Alaska and in the adjacent Territorial waters.

A new hunting technique has been developed--spotting polar bears afloat on the floes from airplanes and then following up with a motor boat and rifle to effect the kill. This has been taking an increasing toll of the bear on the high seas where authority to regulate such hunting is entirely lacking.

Modern transportation, modern guns and a market for polar bear skins and walrus ivory are taking both of these animals out of their historic role of subsistence items for the Eskimo and in many instances are making them articles of commerce.

Because of the seriousness of the situation, Secretary Seaton has already asked that more biological data be acquired and better population estimates of these animals be made to assure keeping the harvest within limits.

The Secretary is also asking that more authority be given to the Alaska Game commission.

Many of the provisions of the bill to revise the Alaska Game Law were worked out jointly by the Alaska Game Commission and the Department. The new legislation would cover game and fur mammals, marine mammals, game and nongame birds and game fishes.

At the present time the responsibility for prescribing regulations governing the harvest, management and protection of Alaska's fish and wildlife resources rests with the Secretary of the Interior, with the Alaska Game Commission acting in an advisory capacity. Under Secretary Seaton's proposal the responsibility for prescribing such regulations would rest with the Alaska Game Commission, with the approval of the regulations by the Secretary. This proposal to place the entire rule-making function with the Commission is in keeping with the practice followed by most States.

The future of the polar bear and the walrus is of primary concern. There is no existing law under which the Department of Interior or the Territory of Alaska can restrict the taking of polar bears and walruses on the high seas. Unrestricted hunting of these animals on the high seas has increased at an alarming rate in recent years. The proposed amendments, applicable to American nationals would provide for protection of these animals on the high seas subject to the provisions of existing law which allows natives to take walruses for subsistence purposes.

Secretary Seaton recommends also that the new law prohibit wanton waste of same animals, as killing a moose for its antlers and wasting the rest of it.

Other changes would eliminate many inflexible provisions from present legislation and permit the Commission to adopt or change management practices to meet changing situations. The Commission would also have the right to prescribe regulations, subject to approval by the Secretary, on reasonable fees for licenses, tags or permits.

The existing authority of the Commission requiring nonresidents to employ guides would be changed to permit the adoption of regulations, in the interest of public safety, to require that all persons hire guides when engaged in hunting or photographing specified species of game or marine animals in specified areas. the Commission would also be given more authority in regard to the qualifications of guides and the conduct of guiding activities. Provision is also made for mandatory revocation of a guide license for a period of from one to five years when a guide is found guilty of violation of the game law or the regulations.

When Alaska becomes a State, responsibility for prescribing and enforcing regulations applicable to the taking of marine mammals on the high seas by persons subject to the jurisdiction of the United States will remain with the Secretary of the Interior.

x x x